

7/5/01 Machine Operator Crushed

A machine operator was killed when he lost control of the asphalt roller he was operating. The 54-year-old victim was dispatched from the union hall that day and had been operating the equipment for approximately 3 hours. The victim had worked as an operating engineer for the past 6 years through the local union.

The victim was operating a 9-wheel asphalt roller, which is used to compact asphalt on a roadway. The 60,000-pound machine was working on a road with a 4% grade. The roller was equipped with rollover protection and the seatbelt was found to be in good operating condition.

The engine stalled on the asphalt roller causing a loss of hydraulics'. The machine rolled backward (free wheeling) gaining speed estimated to be about 20 mph. The machine traveled about ¼ of a mile before it left the road hitting a light pole and the embankment and rolling completely over finally stopping, resting on its' side. The operator was ejected and crushed when the machine rolled over him.

The investigation is in the preliminary stage. The following are some of the facts that are known.

- The seatbelt was found unbuckled. It is not known if the operator had been wearing it and had unbuckled in an attempt to escape the moving machine.
- The asphalt roller was found in the high gear/run mode. The manufacturer's recommendation for operation on a grade is low gear mode.
- The emergency brake showed no evidence of being used.

Questions to ask:

- Do you provide a worksite orientation for new employees?
- Are your operators required to use seatbelts?
- Are your employees aware of the potential consequences when a seatbelt is not worn when operating equipment with roll over protection?
- Are your workers trained in the use of the equipment they will operate, including the differences between similar machinery?
- Do your workers operate equipment in accordance with manufacturer's specifications?
- Are ground personnel (other than the operator) trained on the hazards of working around machinery?